

[Bureau of Reclamation, Western Colorado Area Office]  
[mailed February 11, 1998]

WCN-SMcCall  
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our January 27, 1998, meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. The next meeting has been tentatively scheduled to begin at 12:30 on Tuesday, April 14, 1998, at our office in Grand Junction.

Highlights of the January operation meeting include:

--Snowpack above the Aspinall Unit was 93 percent of average in mid-January, and predicted spring inflow is below normal. Under these conditions, a spring peak may have to be "designed" for sometime in May or June. This will be considered at the April meeting.

--Average monthly flows planned for the Gunnison River through the Black Canyon National Monument and Gunnison Gorge are 1,200-1,600 cfs through June, with flows dropping to 700-1,000 for July through October. It is still early in the year and these plans may change significantly as snowpack changes.

--There are several "special flow requests" that need to be considered as the water year progresses. From September 29 through October 2, flows will be reduced to 600 cfs to help Colorado Division of Wildlife's annual trout census.

--The National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service reported that field studies are complete for their respective reserved water right and endangered fish studies. The due date for completion of the draft synthesis report on endangered fish is delayed, probably until the end of this year.

In addition, if you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meeting, please let us know. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0654.

Sincerely,

Ed Warner

Water Resources Group Chief

Enclosure

bc: Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100, CCI-400  
1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO 81401

Regional Solicitor's Office, Attention: Scott Loveless  
125 South State Street, Room 6201, Salt Lake City UT 84138

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT  
Attention: UC-282 (Bob Adams), UC-298 (Paul Davidson), UC-600, UC-320,  
UC-332 (Ron Sutton) (ea w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, DMutz, EWarner, SMcCall, CStanton, LWest (ea w/encl)  
WCN - KFogelquist, MSteves, RStorbo, JWright (ea w/o encl)

WBR:SMcCall:rb:2/10/98:janasp.smc

Distribution List - January 27, 1998 Aspinall Meeting

\*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

**Argonne National Laboratory** . . . . . John Hayse  
**City of Grand Junction** . . . . . Greg Trainor  
**Club 20** . . . . . Greg Walcher, Shane Henry  
**Colorado State University** . . . . . Brett Johnson  
**Environmental Defense Fund** . . . . . Jim Martin  
**Gunnison Basin POWER** . . . . . Ralph (Butch) Clark  
**Gunnison River Expeditions** . . . . . Hank Hotze, Bo Gates  
**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club** . . . . . Steve Glazer  
**Matt Owens Fly Company** . . . . . Matt Owens  
**Trout Unlimited** . . . . . Pat Oglesby\*  
**Western Colorado Congress** . . . . . Fred Wetlauffer  
**University of Montana** . . . . . Jack Stanford  
**Co. River Water Conservation District** . . . . . Mike Gross\*, Dave Kanzer\*, Ray Tenney  
**North Fork Water Conservancy District** . . . . . Tom Alvey  
**Redlands Water and Power Company** . . . . . Gregg Strong  
**Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association** . . . . . Mark Catlin\*, Jim Hokit\*  
**Upper Colorado River Commission** . . . . . Everett Sunderland\*  
**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District** . . . . . Kathleen Klein  
Mark Schumacher\*, Dennis Steckel\*  
**Delta County Commissioners** . . . . . Donna Ferganchick\*, Jim Ventrello\*  
**Colorado Department of Agriculture** . . . . . Jim Miller  
**Colorado Division of Water Resources** . . . . . Ken Knox, Wayne Schieldt  
**Colorado Division of Wildlife** . . . . . Rick Anderson  
Robert Caskey, Pat Martinez, Sherman Hebein  
Dan Braugh\*  
**Colorado Water Conservation Board** . . . . . Randy Seaholm\*; Ray Alvarado  
**Wyoming State Engineers Office** . . . . . John Shields  
**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** . . . . . Grady McNure  
**U.S. Bureau of Land Management** . . . . . John Arkins\*, Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy\*  
Roy Smith  
**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** . . . . . John Hamill; Henry Maddux, George Smith  
Terry Ireland, Rick Krueger, Chuck McAda\*;  
Reed Harris  
**U.S. National Park Service** . . . . . Chuck Pettee\*; Mark Wondzell\*  
Rick Harris\*; Matt Malick\*, Sheridan Steele\*  
Myron Chase\*; Dave Roberts  
**U.S. National Weather Service** . . . . . Eric Holloway\*, Mike Myers\*  
**U.S. National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration** . . . . . Klaus Weickmann\*  
**U.S. Geological Survey** . . . . . Paul von Guerard, Bob Jenkins\*  
Gordon Mueller; Jonathan Friedman  
**U.S. Western Area Power Administration** . . . . . Gary Burton; Margaret Matter  
Jeff Ackerman, Kathy Crane, Ken Green\*

Annette Falvo\*

**U.S. Bureau of Reclamation** . . . . . Gary McDermott\*, Richard Stodt\*, Ed Warner  
Steve McCall\*, Karen Fogelquist\*, John Ozga\*, Coll Stanton\*, Russ Storbo\*, Lorrie West\*  
Bob Adams\*, Arlo Allen, Paul Davidson\*, Chris Karas, Ron Sutton\*

## Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting

January 27, 1998

**Participation:** This meeting was held in Grand Junction. Attendees are noted on the attached distribution list.

**Purpose of Meeting:** The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. This input is also used in development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which also includes plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units. Operation of the Aspinall Unit is based on projected inflows to its reservoirs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flows for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties. Handouts provided include background data on projected inflows to the reservoirs and proposed operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning are also discussed at the meeting. Field studies leading to flow recommendations to protect downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison River National Monument are being completed. These operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss proposals for long-term changes in operations to address these and related resource management issues, including completion of a Draft Biological Opinion on Aspinall operations that is scheduled for completion in 1999.

August-January Operation: A graph was presented to show daily inflow and content of Blue Mesa, Crystal releases and flows in the river below the Gunnison Tunnel during this period. Reservoir content at the beginning of the period was unusually high due to the above average precipitation patterns in 1997. Releases from Crystal Reservoir remained relatively constant at about 2,000 cfs from the end of July through December, except during the CDOW trout census. Constant releases resulted in increased flows in the Black Canyon as Gunnison Tunnel irrigation diversions were decreased. In January, flows were reduced to around 1,450 cfs.

No major problems or concerns were expressed about the operation during this period. Use of the 'fax tree' is helping to keep people informed of short-term changes in flows, especially as changes affect public safety.

Proposed January-April Operation: At this time the snowpack and projected inflow into the reservoirs is around 90 percent of average and significant spills at Crystal Dam are not predicted. As always, January figures can change significantly by spring runoff.

Blue Mesa Reservoir is projected to fill in June. At the April meeting, decisions will be made on forcing

a spill at Crystal to provide a spring peak flow in May or June. Average flows are projected to be between 1,200 and 1,600 cfs through June, and between 700 and 1,000 cfs in the July through October period.

Special Flow Requests: There is a variety of upcoming activities that require special Gunnison River flow conditions. They are listed in chronologic order for further consideration as the water year progresses.

--In March, Delta County is expecting delivery of girders to replace the Gunnison River bridge near Austin. The contractor will need two weeks of river work to place the girders before working on the platform. Contractors are aware that if their work is not complete before runoff, they may have to wait. The County will need advance warning of any flow changes.

--The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users still need a one-day window of low releases from Crystal (600-700 cfs) to do necessary repair work on the Gunnison Diversion Dam. This request has been on the table for a while, but has not been met due to high flows. They would prefer to do this work in late winter/early spring, before irrigation diversions begin (i.e. about March 20). They can't delay completing this work another year.

--Redlands Water and Power were not in attendance, but they previously reported that they need a 12-24 hour window of flows under 2,000 cfs, at the Whitewater gage, this winter to lower flash boards on the Redlands Diversion. (Releases from Crystal may need to be below 1,000 cfs to meet this request.)

--CDOW is still interested in collecting rainbow trout during their spring spawn period (mid-April to early June) between Crystal and the Gunnison Tunnel. Flows up to 2,000 cfs would be OK, but they would need 'steady' flows and would need to be advised of changes so they could move nets.

--Reclamation's Curecanti Division reported penstock work may be scheduled this May at Blue Mesa. This could limit releases; the group requested that this try to be scheduled early so that a peak flow could be provided later in May. (Plans for forcing a spring peak spill at Crystal will be discussed further at the April meeting.)

--Construction of the TransColorado gas pipeline crossing of the Gunnison River near Roubideau Creek may be planned for July or August. A public meeting for the 404 Permit is scheduled for February 9.

--Dan Braugh of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) requested flows of 600 cfs to complete the annual trout inventory in the Gunnison Gorge from 10 am on Tuesday, September 29 through noon on Friday, October 2. If the repair work on the Gunnison Diversion Dam is not done this spring, the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association would do the repair work probably during the inventory and may not be able to bypass additional water in the tunnel to facilitate the fish inventory as well as help with hydropower production.

--Russ Storbo mentioned we might be contacted by North Fork Trails Network concerning a horseback trail ride in early October that would cross the river above the Uncompahgre River confluence near Delta, and they are interested in flows. They are considering a Saturday around when flows are low for the CDOW census.

--Work scheduled at Morrow Point between October 15 and November 15 will limit releases to 1,500 cfs, which should not present problems at that time of year.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities

**National Park Service** - NPS has no special flow requests this year. They hope to present information on the quantification of the Monument's reserved water right before the end of 1998. All field data has been collected and initial coordination with Federal agencies has occurred to come up with a proposal. Their quantification process hopes to involve a consent decree acceptable to all parties, along with an agreement on how to manage it. Public information (including convening a special meeting of this group) will be provided on the quantification before any water court filing.

A new South Rim Visitor Center will open at the Monument this May. Another improvement planned is a fish cleaning station at Stevens Creek.

**Bureau of Land Management** - The 3-year Gunnison Gorge pilot fee program authorized by the 1996 Omnibus bill will begin May 1. There will be a \$3/person daily charge and \$5/person camping charge for use between the lower boundary of the Monument down to the Smith Fork (16 and under will be free). A season pass for daily use may also be purchased for \$15, and fees may be 'worked off' by 4 hours of service on days to be scheduled, possibly in May or early June. For more information, call BLM in Montrose at 970-248-5310.

**High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club** - These organizations are working on the selenium standards for the Gunnison River and will attend a February 4 task force meeting in Delta. Steve Glazer will also make a presentation to the Mesa County Water Association on February 25 on water storage; and a water quality forum will be held February 26 in Montrose (9 a.m. at Pavilion). His organization is also working with the Glen Canyon Institute on a "Citizens Environmental Assessment" for a proposal on draining Lake Powell.

**Fish and Wildlife Service** - Chuck McAda reported scientists are finishing reports on individual recovery program studies to be consolidated into the 'Synthesis Report'; however the report will be approximately 1 year late. The revised due date for synthesis report (including flow recommendations) is now being scheduled, probably for December 1998. No additional field work is needed. There are no studies planned this year on the Gunnison, although monitoring and tracking fish will continue, as will the monitoring of the Redland's fish ladder. While no special flows are being requested, a spring peak is recommended for the endangered fish.

**Bureau of Reclamation** - Curecanti Field Division appreciated the help of Jim Hokit as they replaced the transformer at Morrow Point. Work in the stilling basin has been completed. Other maintenance work is described above under special flow requests.

Work in preparing the EIS on Aspinall operations will be delayed due to the delay in the endangered fish studies synthesis report and flow recommendations. A Federal Action and purpose and need has been 'narrowly' defined to stress implementation of an operation to meet a reasonable and prudent alternative, to protect and recover endangered fish.

**Colorado River Water Conservation District** - Mike Gross requested an update on the "NPS reserved right and the FWS biological opinion." See the NPS report for information about their process for quantifying their Black Canyon right. At the present time, one recommendation by FWS

that will not be affected by the delay in the Synthesis Report will be a 300 cfs minimum below Redlands. Although flows have been well above 300 cfs during recent years due to above normal precipitation, flows lower than 300 cfs do not need to be studied according to FWS, because the 300 cfs is based on providing a 1-foot depth for fish passage. The River District questions the need to maintain minimum flows year-round; i.e., when/if the ladder is not operated to provide passage.

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District** - Tyler Martineau has retired and a new manager, Kathleen Klein, has been selected. She will be on board in February.

**Colorado Division of Wildlife** - CDOW thanked the Curecanti crew for assistance in fish salvage during the Morrow Point stilling basin repair. Rainbow trout continue the decline that was first noted in 1994 in the Gunnison, based on last September's surveys. Stocking of rainbows is still tentatively planned for the future, but plans are being reviewed. All age and size classes of brown trout populations are increasing; they support the Gold Medal fishery status for the river.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board** - The State is interested and ready to participate in the endangered fish and/or Black Canyon agreement.

**Western Area Power Administration** - Western requested that the National Park Service keep them informed on the schedule for beginning use of the tour boat on Morrow Point. Also this spring, operations will switch from Montrose to Phoenix. Operation contacts will remain the same. A spike flow is being considered at Glen Canyon in late May; this causes a loss of flexibility in the overall power system, and WAPA looks to Aspinall to make up this loss. This peaking loss can normally be made up at Morrow Point and Blue Mesa without affecting river flows; however, if Crystal is spilling it could cause undesirable river flow fluctuations. This will need to be considered if there is a "planned" spill at Crystal.

El Nino--- Klaus Weickmann (National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration) gave an interesting presentation on the El Nino Southern Oscillation. In terms of ocean temperatures, the 1997 El Nino is the largest in the last 100 years. Increased precipitation has occurred as a result over the Pacific near the equator and in some areas of the southwest and California. Because the jet stream 'splits' at the North American coast, effects at our latitude and interior location of Colorado are more difficult to predict. If the jet stream moves south of us, El Nino precipitation does not reach us. A 90-day Global Atmospheric Model developed to estimate precipitation and analyze risk of extreme precipitation shows our near average precipitation to date is not unexpected. However, chances for above normal spring precipitation have increased in our area. The National Center for Environmental Predictions now averages results of many 15-day runs of a model that is beginning to consistently predict west coast rains, and offers some promise for being of use to short-term reservoir operation decisions. Overall the El Nino effect is very real,

but more knowledge is needed before a predictive model can be useful to help us develop long-range plans and make daily decisions to operate reservoirs, especially where it is difficult to predict where storms will track.

Next Meeting - Scheduled for Tuesday on **April 14, 1998** at 12:30, in Reclamation's Grand Junction

office (2754 Compass Drive).